



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

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ORDER AND DETERMINATION BY THE DIRECTOR

Washington is in the midst of one of the warmest and driest winters in its history. Snowpack levels in the mountains are at record lows, with many sites already completely free of snow, and what remains of the snowpack will likely melt several weeks ahead of normal. As a result, water supplies for virtually the entire state of Washington, as forecast by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Weather Service, are projected to be well below normal for the period of April through September 2005. The shortage in spring and summer water supplies creates the strong possibility of undue hardships for water users across the state.

In the Yakima River basin, proratable irrigation districts are facing the prospect of receiving less than one-third of their usual supplies of water. While forecast flows on the main stem of the Columbia River are sufficient to preclude the need to curtail water uses from the river, the same cannot be said for many other rivers on both sides of the state. Stream flows in Western Washington have been at record lows for most of the past several months, with only brief improvements from the occasional storm systems that have passed over the region. Without a doubt, Washington is facing one of the most serious water shortages in recent memory, and perhaps the worst ever.

Even with significant precipitation during the spring and summer months, water-supply conditions across the state are unlikely to fully recover, and they could well worsen. The supply shortfall poses a very serious threat to irrigated crops, public water supplies, and the state's fisheries resource.

Therefore, in accordance with the provisions of RCW 43.83B.405, IT IS ORDERED that the State of Washington is hereby under a drought emergency. This order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect through December 31, 2005, unless terminated prior to that date.

In accordance with the provisions of WAC 173-166-060, Ecology may, under the terms of this order, take the following emergency actions:


1. Issue emergency permits for water.
2. Approve temporary transfers of water rights.
3. Provide funding assistance to public agencies to alleviate drought conditions.
4. Take other actions depending on future developments.

Other state and local agencies with authority to issue permits or authorizations related to the drought emergency actions must provide a decision to an applicant within fifteen (15) calendar days of the date of application.

In accordance with the proclamation of the Governor, dated January 3, 1989 (Centennial Accord), nothing herein shall impair or infringe upon the treaty reserved rights or governmental authority of any federally recognized Indian tribe nor shall this order be deemed an assertion of state authority over Indian reservation lands. The Department of Ecology intends to work cooperatively, on a government-to-government basis, with all affected tribes.

Further details about this order or the actions available under it may be obtained by contacting Doug McChesney of the Department of Ecology, P.O. Box 47600, Olympia, WA 98504-7600 or (360) 407-6306. Applications for emergency water permits or temporary transfers of water rights may be obtained by contacting one of Ecology's regional offices in Bellevue, Lacey, Spokane, or Yakima.

DATED this 10th day of March, 2005.


Jay Manning, Director
Department of Ecology